

How to Start a School Composting Program

By Alpha Elementary School
Morristown, Tennessee

These are the steps we recommend because they have worked well for us:

1. Appoint a committee consisting of custodians, cafeteria manager, a group of students, and a teacher sponsor. Our student group is the Safety Patrol Team, and the teacher sponsor of the Safety Patrol serves on the Compost Committee.
2. A parent volunteer built our compost bin. You may need to build it to keep dogs and other animals out. A local lumberyard donates a load of old sawdust, and the City of Morristown donates a load of leaves at the beginning of each school year. These items are used daily to mix in the fresh food scraps. An Earth Machine, a type of vessel composter, would simplify the mixing process.
3. At the beginning of the school year, the cafeteria manager and the Safety Patrol meet with each grade in the cafeteria to explain the compost program as well as the recycling program. The Safety Patrol members demonstrate what goes in the compost bucket and explain what may not be composted. Students seem to remember and understand the process best when their peers demonstrate the procedure.
4. A station is set up close to the area in the cafeteria where students empty their trays. A dry-erase board on the wall lists the items that are acceptable for composting that day. A five-gallon bucket with a handle is placed below the board for collecting the items.
5. Meat, dairy products, grease, and oil are never acceptable items for composting.
6. During lunch period each day, Safety Patrol members are on a rotating schedule to help one day each week. They assist the students in placing compostables, recyclables, and disposables in the proper place. After lunch, a custodian takes the compost bucket to the compost bin and adds it to the pile, mixing it with sawdust and leaves.
7. The custodians maintain the compost bin and the recycling containers. The money from the sale of plastic bottles and aluminum cans goes to one of our "Kids Care" projects, which allows students to give back to the community. In the spring, the finished compost is used on our campus in flowerbeds and around trees.